



Connecticut General Assembly
SENATE DEMOCRATS

Legislative Office Building, Room 3300
Hartford, Connecticut 06106-1591

Good morning Senator Anwar, Representative Linehan, and members of the Children's Committee. I am here to express my strong support for SB 2: AN ACT CONCERNING SOCIAL EQUITY AND THE HEALTH, SAFETY, AND EDUCATION OF CHILDREN. This bill seeks to address the needs of children, many of which exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Children in Connecticut have diverse needs, and this bill includes a number of methods to remediate concerns in a variety of areas.

This bill touches on several areas in the lives of Connecticut's children – one of which is mental health. This bill seeks to establish a youth suicide prevention training program, which will be administered as a train-the-trainer model designed to empower municipal leaders to initiate suicide prevention measures across their communities. Senate Bill 2 also requires certain licensed healthcare professionals to complete mental health and suicide prevention training. Many fields in the healthcare industry already have similar training, and this standard would now extend to fields like Physicians Assistants, EMRs, EMTs, and Behavior Analysts. Children will experience a continuity of mental health care across each healthcare professionals with whom they interact. The bill also permits minors to receive more than six outpatient mental health treatment sessions without the consent of a parent or guardian. The adjustment of this ceiling on care is essential to ensure that our youth are not cutting their care short of their needs to adapt to our state's laws. Finally, this bill provides up to four excused mental health

wellness days from school during their school year, which will allow students time to address their mental health needs in the same way excused absences address physical health needs currently.

Our children access some of their most powerful resources, tools, and supports in the school environment, and Senate Bill 2 has a number of components that will bolster school-based care. This bill requires local and regional boards of education to integrate social-emotional learning programs into the professional development of educators. Social-Emotional learning is a data-driven, proven method to develop youth beyond their academic aptitude. Another section of the bill creates the mandate for parent-teacher conferences to be offered during times of virtual learning, just as they would be during in-person learning. Parent-teacher conferences are important touchpoints to bridge a student's home and school life, and they must be continued even when students are not physically in a school building. S.B. 2 requires the provision of key safety, mental health, and food insecurity resources to families when learning is remote, which is another essential care step to ensure that students' needs are being met when teachers are not physically able to be near and evaluate students. This bill would launch an internet access grant program to offer students, teachers, and staff the tools they need during remote learning sessions. The bill also requires students to be counted present in school if they attend schools remotely, where a remote learning option exists. Finally, the bill requires the collection of adverse childhood experiences, which schools can use to evaluate their own resources and be sure they are meeting students' needs.

A third set of the bill's components involve the Department of Children and Families. Firstly, DCF will be required to offer remote visitation opportunities between families and children if in-person visitation poses a health risk, as in the case of a pandemic. The bill also requires the Commissioner of DCF to develop a policy to protect the health and safety of

caseworkers in the case of a pandemic or communicable disease. These two policies are simple ways to ensure the health and safety of the vulnerable youth in our DCF system. Another portion of the bill asks DCF to expand their Careline to a text-to-care program, so youth could provide information on child abuse or neglect via text. This is increasingly important during extended time in the home, and in a world where youth are less comfortable on the phone. Finally, this bill seeks to have DCF provide a list of resources at the time of notice of a considered removal meeting between a child, families, and DCF. Notice of this kind would ensure that families are empowered to feel prepared for these meetings and understand their rights and available resources.

The last components of this bill seek to address the needs of children overall. The bill would expand birth-to-three programs to all qualified children under the age of five and eliminate fees for such services. The fees are currently waived by the Governor's Executive Orders, and the expansion of the program would ensure that children would receive services from birth through kindergarten, where their services would be addressed by the state department of education. Finally, the bill launches the Whole Child Initiative, which assembles a taskforce to examine ways to address the needs of children in every facet of their life. The thinking behind this taskforce is that children are most cared for when their personal, emotional, physical, mental, and other needs are met.

I urge you to support this bill and, in effect, the children of the state of Connecticut by voting to advance this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Martin Looney".A handwritten signature in blue ink that appears to read "Bob D'A".

Martin M. Looney
President Pro Tempore
State Senator 11th District



Mary Daugherty Abrams
State Senator 13th District



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State Senator 10th District



Marilyn Moore
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Steve Cassano
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